NOTICE OF PREPARATION
OF AN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT/ ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

January 26, 2006

TO: State Clearinghouse
Responsible and Trustee Agencies
Interested Agencies and Parties

FROM: Sonoma County Water Agency
2150 W. College Avenue
Santa Rosa, CA 95401

NORTH SONOMA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL REUSE PROJECT

In accordance with the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) the Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency) has prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the proposed **North Sonoma County Agricultural Reuse Project** (Project). The Agency will be the Lead Agency pursuant to CEQA and the United States Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) will be the Lead Agency pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Agency is requesting comments from responsible and trustee agencies, property owners and interested parties regarding the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the EIR/EIS.

The EIR/EIS will be prepared by the Agency in accordance with CEQA, the State CEQA Guidelines, the Agency's *Procedures for the Implementation of CEQA*, NEPA, and the United States Bureau of Reclamation NEPA Handbook. The EIR/EIS is a public document that will provide a description of the proposed Project, its environmental setting, and a detailed analysis regarding the potential environmental impacts related to construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed Project. Where possible, the EIR/EIS will describe ways to reduce or avoid potential environmental impacts.

The following sections describe background information, the project location, purpose, description, jurisdictional/permitting agencies, issues to be addressed in the EIR/EIS, and the public comment period for this NOP.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Agency is a special district that was created by the California Legislature in 1949 and operates under the direction of a Board of Directors (Board), composed of the members of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. The law that created the Agency and defines its powers and duties gives it the authority to produce and furnish surface water and groundwater for beneficial uses, to control floodwaters, to generate electricity, and to provide recreational facilities in connection with the Agency's facilities. Legislation enacted in 1994 added the treatment and disposal of wastewater to the Agency's powers and duties.

In 1997, the Agency conducted a Recycled Water Workshop to evaluate the feasibility of a Sonoma County Recycled Water Distribution System. Conceptual layouts of pipeline routes and storage reservoir sites were presented as well as the benefits of expanded use of recycled water in Sonoma County. The workshop identified several north Sonoma County areas, including the Alexander Valley, Russian River Valley, and Dry Creek Valley areas as potential recipients of recycled water for agricultural use.

In 1999, the North Sonoma County Water Conservation Corporation (Corporation) was formed to secure a reliable water supply for irrigation and related agricultural purposes within north Sonoma County. The Corporation envisioned developing facilities to make recycled water from the City of Santa Rosa's (City) System and possibly other wastewater operators in the area available for agricultural purposes via the City's Geysers Pipeline. A system of storage reservoirs would be filled during periods when excess recycled water from the Geysers Pipeline is available for agricultural uses. The reservoirs would serve certain lands that are within a reasonable proximity to the supply reservoirs through a pipeline distribution network. The Corporation is now known as the Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA).

In 2003, the City of Santa Rosa's Geysers Recharge Project began delivering approximately 11 million gallons per day of tertiary-treated recycled water from the City's system via a 41-mile underground pipeline to the Geysers steam field to generate electricity. This 48-inch pipe contains recycled water turnouts that allow for potential reuse along a route within the Alexander, Russian River, and Dry Creek Valleys.

After the Geysers Pipeline became operational, the City approved the Incremental Recycled Water Program. The City completed a program EIR that identified several options to maximize reuse opportunities and best use its recycled water while protecting public health and the environment. One alternative listed within the City's program EIR was the use of recycled water for agricultural irrigation, in part, within the Russian River area between the communities of Windsor and Healdsburg and the Alexander Valley and Dry Creek Valley areas. Recycled water would be delivered to these areas via the Geysers Pipeline, which is adjacent to these areas.

PROJECT LOCATION, PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION

PROJECT LOCATION

The lands to be served by the proposed Project are located in four geographic sub-areas. The four geographic sub-areas (Figure 1) are described below.

- *Russian River Valley Area* - This area is located south of Healdsburg and west of Windsor and is generally within the floodplains and portions of the hillsides to the east and west of the Russian River;
- *Alexander Valley Area* - This area is located north of Healdsburg and east of Highway 101 and generally includes the valley floor and portions of the hillsides to the north and south;
- *Northern Alexander Valley Area* - This area is located north of Alexander Valley within the valley floor stretching between Cloverdale and Geyserville;
- *Dry Creek Valley Area* - This area is located within the valley floor, and includes portions of the hillsides between Warm Springs Dam and the confluence of Dry Creek and the Russian River.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of the proposed Project is to: (1) reduce agricultural reliance on natural regional water supplies; (2) provide an alternative source of water for agricultural irrigation; and (3) address potential regulatory issues. Currently, agricultural lands in the area are irrigated with water originating from the Russian River and its tributaries or from groundwater wells. Use of recycled water for agricultural purposes on project lands would reduce reliance on the Russian River and its tributaries as well as on local groundwater wells. Additionally, Federal and State regulatory agencies have expressed concern regarding potential impacts of agricultural use of natural water supplies on fisheries resources and habitat within the Russian River and its tributaries. Providing agricultural lands with an alternative source of water would allow water to remain in the Russian River and its tributaries, thus providing benefits to listed fish species and their habitat. The recycled water would be used for agricultural purposes consistent with the California Code of Regulations, Title 22 pertaining to the use of tertiary-treated recycled water.

PROJECT BENEFITS

The proposed Project would provide both a beneficial use of recycled water for agricultural purposes and alternative source of disposal for local wastewater operators. The proposed Project would also offset use of water that is currently diverted from the Russian River, its tributaries, and groundwater sources.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed Project would consist of the following:

- Design, construction, operation, and maintenance of distribution pipelines and lateral lines to connect the existing Geysers Pipeline to off-stream water storage facilities and potential agricultural lands;
- Design, construction, operation, and maintenance of ancillary structures including pump stations, booster pump stations, protective fencing, gates, landscaping and other support structures and appurtenances;
- Design, construction, operation, and maintenance and use of several off-stream water storage facilities to provide an estimated 11,000 acre-feet (AF) of storage capacity;
- Provision of recycled water by various regional wastewater operators; and,
- The use of recycled water on agricultural lands in the Russian River, Dry Creek, and Alexander Valleys (Figure 1).

PIPELINES AND ANCILLARY STRUCTURES

Recycled water would be transported to the proposed Project area via the existing Geysers Pipeline. Individual agricultural areas would receive recycled water via existing lateral lines and agricultural water distribution systems or through constructed lateral lines to connect with existing agricultural water distribution systems. Potential alignments would likely follow existing public right-of-ways and existing property lines taking into account proximity to existing agricultural land, environmental and engineering constraints, as well as private property issues. In addition to storage sites and distribution pipelines, pump stations, fencing and other ancillary structures and appurtenances would be

constructed as part of the proposed Project. Potential pipeline alignments will be described in detail within the EIR/EIS. The location of potential pipeline alignments and booster pump station sites currently identified are shown in Figure 1.

OFF-STREAM WATER STORAGE FACILITIES

Storage reservoirs would be required to store recycled water until it can be used for irrigation. Criteria that may be used to identify potential sites include engineering, topography and environmental constraints as well as other factors such as property ownership, proximity to existing recycled water facilities and overall cost. Potential storage reservoirs sites will be described in detail in the EIR/EIS. The locations of potential storage reservoir sites currently identified are shown in Figure 1.

POTENTIAL RECYCLED WATER SOURCES

Potential sources of recycled water are described below. Identification of possible sources is not an indication that a recycled water agreement or other arrangement has been completed. Delivery and transfer of ownership of recycled water would only occur upon approval of each agency's governing body and completion of all required environmental documents/permitting and approval of the proposed Project by each agency's governing body. Potential sources include:

- City of Santa Rosa's Laguna Subregional Wastewater Treatment Facility;
- Airport/ Larkfield/ Wikiup Sanitation Zone Wastewater Treatment Plant;
- Town of Windsor's Wastewater Treatment Facility;
- City of Healdsburg;
- City of Cloverdale; and,
- Geyserville Sanitation Zone

For some of the facilities listed above, the use of recycled water for the proposed Project would require environmental review and subsequent project approval. Upon completion of environmental review and approval of each project, the Agency may negotiate recycled water agreements with each individual agency.

POTENTIAL RECYCLED WATER USERS

Potential areas of recycled water use include approximately 21,000 acres of agricultural lands (vineyards and orchards) within four geographical areas of the Russian River watershed: Russian Valley, Alexander Valley, North Alexander Valley, and Dry Creek Valley.

JURISDICTIONAL/PERMITTING AGENCIES

The following public entities and agencies may require review of the proposed Project or may have jurisdiction over the project area:

- U.S. Department of Interior – Bureau of Reclamation;
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service;

- National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service;
- California Department of Fish and Game;
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans);
- Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department; and,
- California Regional Water Quality Control Board, North Coast Region

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE EIR/EIS

In accordance with CEQA and NEPA, the EIR/EIS will address the potential environmental impacts associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed Project. Specific areas of analysis will include: aesthetics, agricultural resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, environmental justice, geology and soils, hazards, hydrology and water quality, land use, energy and mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, socio-economic effects, transportation/traffic, and utilities and service systems.

The EIR/EIS will discuss alternatives to the proposed Project. Information to be included in the EIR/EIS will also be based on input and comments received during the review period for the NOP. Decision-makers, responsible and trustee agencies under CEQA/NEPA, property owners, and interested persons and parties will also have an opportunity to comment on the Draft EIR/EIS after it is published and circulated for public review. Mitigation measures will be proposed to avoid or reduce such impacts, where reasonably feasible.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR THIS NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. The public comment period will close at 5:00 p.m. on March 15, 2006. Please include a name, address, and telephone number of a contact person in your agency for all future correspondence on this subject. Please send your comments to:

Sonoma County Water Agency
Attn: David Cuneo, Senior Environmental Specialist
P.O. Box 11628
Santa Rosa, CA 95406-1628

You may also submit comments electronically at the Agency's website:

www.sonomacountywater.org

OPEN HOUSE SCOPING MEETING

In order for the public and regulatory agencies to have an opportunity to ask questions and submit comments on the scope of the EIR, a Scoping Meeting will be held during the NOP review period. The Scoping Meeting will use an Open House format. Agency staff will be available to answer questions and provide information about the proposed Project, but a formal presentation will not be made to allow interested parties to participate anytime during the Open House. Written comment forms will be supplied for those who wish to submit written comments at the scoping meeting; written comments

may also be submitted anytime during the NOP review period. The date, time, and location of the Scoping Meeting are listed below:

Date: Thursday, February 16th, 2006

Time: 5:30 to 7:00 PM – Open House, 7:00 to 8:00 PM – Presentation and Questions/Answers

Location: Alexander Valley Community Hall
5512 Highway 128
Healdsburg, CA 95448

Directions: From Healdsburg - Take Healdsburg Avenue north to Alexander Valley Road. Go east on Alexander Valley Road, across the Russian River, to the intersection of Alexander Valley Road and Highway 128. Go north 1 mile on Highway 128; on right side.

Documents or files related to the proposed Project are available for review at the Agency's Administrative Office located at 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, California.

If you have any questions, or if you wish to update your information on our mailing list, please contact David Cuneo at (707) 547-1935.

PUBLICATION DATE: January 26, 2006